

# The Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter

Nº25, August 1999

## The 'noted' architect



**A**S ANYONE who has recently drawn cash from a Clydesdale Bank wall machine will know, Alexander Thomson has been honoured by having his portrait engraved on the new Clydesdale £20 note. This is both to mark the Thomson Exhibition, for which the Clydesdale Bank was the principal sponsor, and to celebrate Glasgow's reign as U.K. City of Architecture and Design in 1999. On the reverse of the note appears the dome of Holmwood House and the elevation of the old part of The Lighthouse – the former *Glasgow Herald* building detailed by Mackintosh on behalf of Honeyman & Keppie.

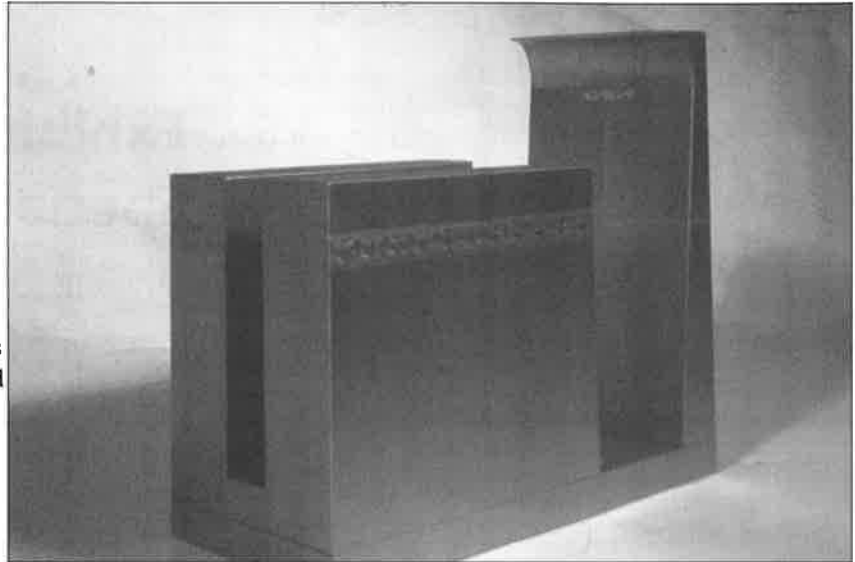
Thomson is only the second British architect to be honoured in this way. Sir Christopher Wren with St Paul's Cathedral appeared on a Bank of England £50 note a few years back, but not even the great Soane, architect to the Bank of England, has been celebrated on a banknote as a national figure (as he richly deserves to be). It is certainly appropriate with Thomson who, perhaps thanks to his brother George and his other professional partners, ran a successful commercial practice and left over £15,000 at his death.

**Inside: New Book Offers and  
Thomson's Architectural Theory**

# A monument for Thomson's grave

**T**HE subject set for this year's Alexander Thomson Travelling Scholarship was the design of a monument to go above the unmarked grave on Thomson and his family in the Western Division of the Southern Necropolis.

The Scholarship (whose second holder, in 1890, was, of course, one C.R. McIntosh) is now administered by the Glasgow Institute of Architects and the judges – Gordon Murray and A. Gordon Smith for the GIA, Deyan Sudjic, Mark Baines, Alexander Stoddart and Gavin Stamp – were unanimous in awarding first prize to the design submitted by Edward Taylor, of the Mackintosh School of Architecture, together with George Andrew, of the University of Strathclyde. The competition brief required a design that would be durable, easily maintained and appropriate to its setting, and the judges admired the winning design for a monument in polished concrete with inlaid bronze for being in the spirit of Thomson's architecture without being a

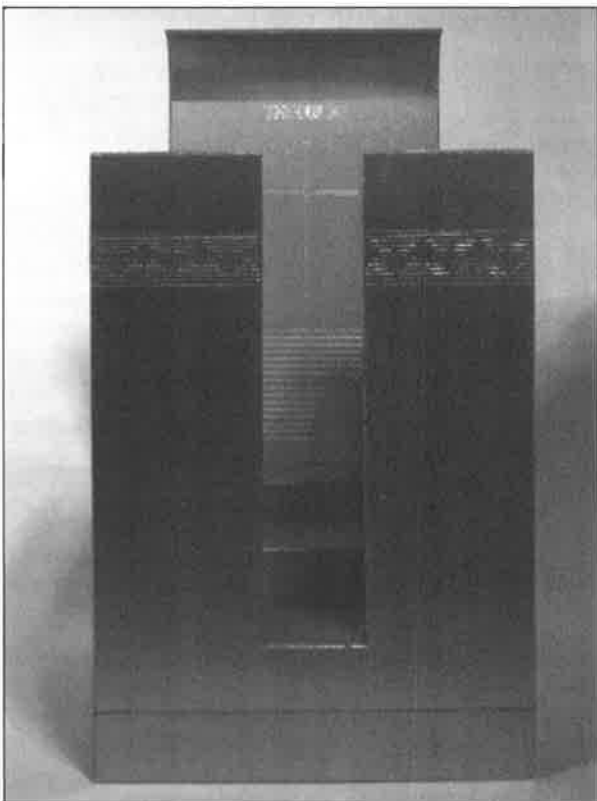


copy of any existing design.

It is now hoped to execute this design. Indeed, in Glasgow's reign as UK City of Architecture and Design and in the year of the Thomson Exhibition, it is surely necessary to end a long-running scandal and mark the final resting place of one of the city's – and Scotland's – greatest architects. We do not know what stone was originally raised on this site, but it is inconceivable that Thomson did not design a gravestone. He bought two lairs on 17th March 1854, three days after the death of his eldest child, Agnes, and he buried four more of his children there before he himself was laid to rest in the Southern Necropolis on 26th March 1875 [Thomson's 'Subscriber's Pass-Book' for the Southern Necropolis, issued when he purchased the lairs, is a poignant item in the Exhibition]. Had there been no stone above this grave, the Trustees of the Alexander Thomson Memorial would surely have raised one after the architect's death. It is assumed that, along with many others, any gravestone was removed, un-recorded, by Glasgow Corporation in the 1950s following the neglect and vandalising of the cemetery.

All that is required now is the money to construct the proposed monument once the precise location of Thomson's grave has been conformed. Estimates are being sought and the Society will be glad to receive donations on behalf of the GIA.

*Above and left: Edward Taylor and George Andrew's winning design.*



# The Sacred and Aesthetic Principles of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson's Architecture

"The form of the temple was not controlled by any utilitarian considerations," wrote Thomson; "... so the highest powers of the greatest minds were taxed in symbols and in abstract forms and combinations of lines which resulted in the sacred architecture of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks." And, it would seem, in that of the modern Glaswegians. The use of proportional systems has been detected in the design of Holmwood House and now, as Edward Taylor reveals, in the design of the St Vincent Street Church.

It is increasingly clear that Thomson was interested in "sacred geometry" and ideal proportional systems as well as in other forms of symbolism – see the long running controversy in the pages of this *Newsletter* between Professors James Stevens Curl and Sam McKinstry. Unfortunately, what has hampered historians has been a lack of firm evidence about Thomson's thinking and approach to design. Now, in this article, Edward Taylor relates Thomson's architecture not only to the ideas revealed by his lecture texts but also to contemporary thinking and published literature. In doing so, he both places Thomson's achievement in a wider context while emphasising the originality of his thought.

This important essay, which we are publishing in two parts, was submitted this year as a Fourth Year dissertation in the Mackintosh School of Architecture, and was awarded a distinction by the external examiner. Mr Taylor, we note, was also the joint winner of the Alexander Thomson Travelling Studentship awarded this year for a design for a monument to go on Thomson's unmarked grave.

The laws of architecture do not consist of a series of arbitrary contrivances. They were not invented by man, but were discovered by him.

(Alexander Thomson, Haldane Lectures, II)

**T**HROUGHOUT the lecture texts of Alexander Thomson, there is a frequency with which he mentions terms such as 'divine harmonies', 'eternal truths', 'harmonious proportions' and 'laws of architecture'. These terms have been largely overlooked in previous studies of Thomson, perhaps being viewed as having no greater significance than as evidence of his strong faith in God, or Victorian anachronisms. However, they could also seem to suggest a belief in the value of 'sacred geometry'.

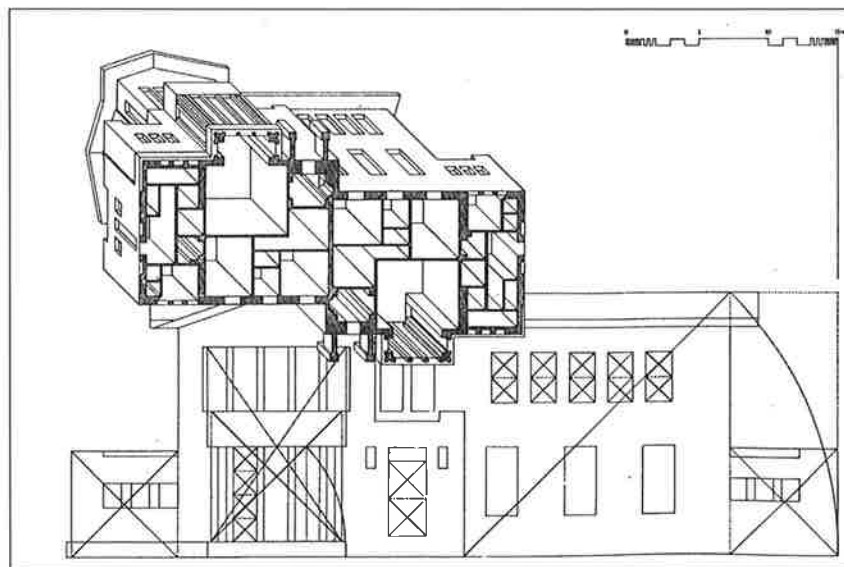
Little proportional or geometrical analysis has been published with regard to Thomson's work. In a note following his essay Thomson's City published in the book *'Greek' Thomson*, John McKean wrote with regard to the Double Villa (1856-57), that 'Thomson's geometric obsession,

with 3:5 proportions and with root-two geometry, is clearly seen in plan, elevation and perspective of this building.' Earlier, in an article published in the *Architect's Journal* (19 February 1986), McKean had illustrated a proportional analysis of the Double Villa's principal facade based on squares and root-two rectangles (*below*).

'The composition of facades', McKean stated, 'is strictly controlled, based on simple harmonic relationships'. He also suggested that the architecture of the Double Villa was 'based on the timeless laws distilled from the classics, and formed in careful and abstractly precise proportions'. David McRitchie of Page and Park Architects, whilst working on the recent restoration of Thomson's Holmwood Villa, also observed a use of proportions such as squares and root-two rectangles, notably in determining the shapes and sizes of rooms in the plan.

In relation to the debate regarding St. Vincent Street Church and the Temple of Solomon, Professor Curl drew attention to various

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numeric occurrences in the distribution of some of the church's architectural elements, and attributed them with Freemasonic significance. For example, in *Newsletter* N°12, Professor Curl noted, in each of St. Vincent Street Church's Ionic prostyle porticoes the significance of the *six* columns, six being a number of both mathematical and symbolic significance, composed also of one (Monad) two (Dyad), and three (Triad). Sam McKinstry, however, in the following *Newsletter* attempted to dismiss Professor Curl's suggestions as too conveniently chosen.

There may be a natural modern scepticism towards assertions that Thomson was using proportional principles and absolute geometrical figures implicitly. This may either stem from an almost fanatical modern belief in complete artistic freedom and personal expression or be based on a reasonable view of Thomson's romantic and painterly architectural genius. Proportional systems and their canons have often been interpreted as constraining and restrictive, and in such a view, they would surely not be applicable to Thomson's work, where a great freedom of thought and depth of emotion is exhibited.

In 1949 Rudolf Wittkower first published his influential book *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* – a study of the theories of harmonic proportions developed in the Renaissance. Wittkower noted in the introduction that prior to his work the architecture of the Renaissance had been 'interpreted in terms which stress its worldliness'. After its first publication Sir Kenneth Clark wrote in the *Architectural Review* that the result

of the book was 'to dispose, once and for all, of the hedonistic, or purely aesthetic, theory of Renaissance architecture.'

The final chapter of Wittkower's book was entitled 'the Break-Away from the Laws of Harmonic Proportion'. In it he identified a systematic erosion of the Renaissance theories, with new schools of thought emerging in the eighteenth century. Wittkower stated that 'the harmonic mathematical conception of architecture was philosophically overthrown in the age of 'nature and feeling' and disappeared from the practical handling of proportion'. It was also an age of empiricism, but a sceptical empiricism which questioned the existence of universal truths and put more importance on the value of shared sentiment. In respect of these views Wittkower cited David Hume (1711-1776) – a central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment and a thinker who has had a great influence on subsequent schools of modern philosophy.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an author and statesman whose *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* had a major impact on writers of the Romantic period, was seen by Wittkower as having a pivotal role in shaping subsequent opinion regarding proportion. Interestingly, Burke is briefly mentioned by Thomson in his first Haldane Lecture. Sam McKinstry noted Thomson's debt to Burke 'as massive as it is obvious', in his essay, 'Thomson's Architectural Theory' in the book '*Greek* Thomson'. McKinstry went on to note that 'Thomson was well aware of the developments in aesthetic theory that had succeeded Burke's book', but that 'it was clearly to

Burke that Thomson remained most indebted.' One of Burke's successors Archibald Alison, also mentioned by Thomson, was to propose that 'the sublimity or Beauty of Forms arises from the Associations we connect with them,' in his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*.

In Thomson's attainment of 'the sublime' in architecture, he achieved many of the effects that Burke and his followers had advocated. However, other comparisons with their views, particularly with regard to proportion, seem to render them more distant philosophically than has been supposed so far. In the passage where Thomson referred to Burke and Alison, whilst not being directly critical of them, he expressed the inadequacies implicit in the titles of their works, and introduced another word – *aesthetic*. He then stated that, 'the Greeks, who carried mental culture to a much higher degree than any other people, devoted their best energies to the study of *æsthetics* and the *æsthetic faculty*.' Whilst Thomson urged the artist to use discernment in the study of nature's superior forms, it is clear that he did not see this faculty as the *source* of the superiority.

Continuing on the study of *æsthetics*, Thomson asserted that this faculty of the mind is something which 'brings us face to face with the divine' and alluded to a concept that 'exists where man never sees it'. He went on to state that, 'it is not the mere evidence of the Master's hand; it is a distinct element, having manifestly some greater purpose to serve.'

Dividing the 'æsthetic faculty' into three aspects, Thomson identified, 'the perceptive, the selective

and the creative'. In the 'perceptive' Thomson saw a basic cognitive desire for beauty, and in the 'selective', the ability to discriminate- 'a very mysterious power, something that lies deeper than sense or reason.' Thomson's view of the selective faculty obviously went beyond noticing 'resemblances' (Burke) or making 'associations' (Alison). In the third aspect of the aesthetic faculty, the 'creative', Thomson cited Music and Architecture, as examples of man reaching beyond his experience, and becoming, with God, 'in however humble a sense, a co-Creator'. It was with regard to this co-creative 'duty' that Thomson proposed to assess man's achievements in the remaining three lectures.

Thomson was not alone among his contemporaries in the study of aesthetics. Of particular note are some striking parallels between many of Thomson's opinions expressed in his lectures and the works published by David Ramsay Hay of Edinburgh (1797-1866) throughout the 1830's, 40's and 50's. A comparative study of the two it is hoped will shed new light upon Thomson's architectural theories.

## D.R. Hay and Thomson

Although less well known today, D.R. Hay was in his own lifetime known in artistic circles throughout Britain and perhaps beyond. However his sphere of influence, was particularly Scotland which as a nation he sought to put on an equal footing with its 'sister kingdom'. As a practitioner his work was as an interior decorator, the professional status of which he raised to new levels of prestige in

Scotland, and was sometimes given the subtitle, 'Decorative Painter to the Queen'. Today it is this interior work for which he is primarily known.

However, with great zeal Hay published numerous theoretical books on the 'universal' proportional principles of nature, music, art and architecture, which were widely reviewed and somewhat unique in content amongst British theoretical treatises of the time. Hay enjoyed the support of Scotland's leading Greek Revivalists such as Glasgow's David Hamilton (1768-1843) and Edinburgh's William H. Playfair (1789-1857). He was also a devoted friend and correspondent of David Roberts (1796-1864).

Thomson may have admired Hay's acquaintances but there may have been more direct links between Hay and Thomson. It is strongly suspected that the artist responsible for decorating Holmwood's interior was C.T. Bowie, who had been apprenticed to Hay. Also, in a review of the Scottish Exhibition Rooms in Bath Street, designed by Thomson, the *Builder*, in April 1855, noted that 'there is also a good ceiling by Mr. D.R. Hay, of Edinburgh', on it were the names of celebrated architects. Among other 'rooms' and exhibits likely to have been of great interest to Thomson were extensive works by David Roberts, as well as 'fine stained-glass' by the artist and poet James Ballantine, who was a mutual friend of Roberts and Hay. Ballantine was on the committee for the exhibition, as was Thomson. With regard to the exhibition, the *Builder* had noted that, 'A remarkable and admirable feature in the business, is the cordiality with which these local

architects, with an utter absence of professional jealousy, have worked hand-in-hand together, showing how paltry considerations vanish when a noble work is to be done.' It is, however, perhaps unnecessary to prove a physical link, as comparisons of what Hay wrote and Thomson later lectured may provide strong enough evidence to prove the latter's awareness of the former.

It is immediately apparent from a reading of Thomson's Haldane Lectures together with works by Hay, that a number of terms and phrases are shared by both authors. For example, in the third Haldane Lecture, Thomson stated that, 'The gardener, while gratifying the desire for variety, at the same time puts it under subjection to the law of harmonious contrast', one of Hay's earlier works was entitled *The Laws of Harmonious Colouring...* However, upon a closer examination, it would appear that Thomson's underlying philosophical argument, developed through course of the Haldane Lectures, follows the same tenets as Hay, as expounded in the theoretical parts of his books (as opposed to the practical and illustrated portions).

General modern usage of the word 'aesthetics' in Britain dates to the 1830's. Its popular meaning at the time derived from eighteenth century German works, such as Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1759-58). Baumgarten developed the German derivation 'aesthetik' in mounting a 'criticism of taste', and used it to denote a science. Kant argued to give the word a metaphysical dimension. Gwilt's *Encyclopaedia of Architecture* of 1842, is disparaging about the term,

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which it described as 'silly and pedantic', and perhaps detecting alien continental influence, 'one of the metaphysical and useless additions to nomenclature in the arts in which the German writers abound.'

Today the word has generally come to mean a sensual appreciation of art, and different works may be now be said to have *different aesthetics*, not better or worse, just different. An 'aesthete' is now seen as a person who affects an extravagant love of art. This modern liberal definition, perhaps as developed from Gwilt's Anglo-centric view, seems to be completely at odds with how Hay and Thomson understood the word, which is for the purposes of this study distinguished by the alternative spelling 'æsthetic'.

In the introduction to *The Science of Beauty: as developed in nature and applied in art* of 1856 (a drawing together of some of his earlier work), Hay urged that, 'Æsthetic culture should consequently supersede servile copying, as the basis of instruction in our schools of art.' Later, also in the first chapter, Hay offered his own definition of æsthetics: 'Æsthetic science, as the science of beauty is now termed, is based upon that great harmonic law of nature which pervades and governs the universe.' Hay and Thomson viewed the 'æsthetic element' as a thing present to a greater or lesser extent in a work of art and that the quality of the work depended on how much of the æsthetic element it possessed.

If Thomson expressed reservations about the schools of Burke and Alison subtly, Hay was direct, although by his own admission was 'reluctant' to differ with 'so great

an author' as Burke. In the introduction to *Proportion or the Geometric Principle of Beauty Analysed* of 1843, Hay strongly criticised Burke's views on proportion, which he saw as 'extraordinary' given the general excellence of Burke's essay.

Burke's opinion of proportion, as analysed by Hay, was that since proportion is a matter of reasoning and intellectual understanding it cannot therefore be a primary cause in the appreciation of beauty which is a matter of the senses. Hay's view, which is concordant with Thomson's, was that the 'harmonic laws of nature' are at the heart of all beauty whether we have discerned the underlying principles or not. According to Thomson, things apprehended by the senses, where the underlying principles have not been discovered, should be described as 'Facts', but that the essence of a thing, if recognised is 'Truth'.

Hay cited the English translation of Victor Cousin's *Philosophy of the Beautiful*, in the introduction to *The Science of Beauty*. Cousin (1792-1867), although from France, was often more closely associated with contemporary German philosophy than the French and he had personal contact with both Schelling and Hegel. Firstly Hay quoted the translator, J.C. Daniel, who stated that 'the English writers have advocated no theory which allows the beautiful to be universal and absolute', but that for some of the French and German writers, 'the beautiful is "simple, immutable, absolute, though its *forms* are manifold."' In the passages of Cousin illustrated by Hay, the necessity of an absolute in beauty is clearly expounded.

Thomson's own belief in an absolute is asserted again at the beginning of the second Haldane Lecture, where he powerfully stated that:

We often hear of the laws of architecture and of architectural rules; people speak of them as they would the rules of a game. This is a serious and most mischievous error. The laws of architecture do not consist of a series of arbitrary contrivances. They were not invented by man, but were discovered by him.

In nature Hay perceived a division into the 'symmetrical' and 'picturesque', based, according to him, upon Aristotle's contrary principles of 'uniformity' and 'variety'. Thomson similarly analysed the 'forms' and 'effects' of nature. In the picturesque works of nature, Hay attributed the same 'precise principles of harmony' to the cause of their beauty as with the recognisably symmetrical forms. However, Hay suggested that these principles in the picturesque may only 'yield an obedience...so subtly, that they cannot be detected in its constitution, but are only felt in the response by which true genius acknowledges their presence.' He continued, 'The generality of mankind may be capable of perceiving this latter kind of beauty, and of feeling its effects upon the mind, but men of genius, only, can impart it to works of art, whether addressed to the eye or the ear.' Concurrent with these views of Hay, Thomson stated in the first Haldane Lecture that the duty of the artist is to explain the 'truths contained in these "Elder Scriptures"', i.e. nature.

In perceiving an underlying law or order running through all of nature, these 'æsthetic' theories seem to be consistent with molecu-

lar discoveries in twentieth century science and even the discovery of chaos theory (see Appendix II), as well as showing a liberal Christian theology consistent with not only Greek philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras but other ancient systems of wisdom.

In the two different types of nature perceived, both Thomson and Hay urged a distinction between that which is 'superior' and that which is 'inferior', and, in Thomson's words 'to separate what is beautiful and rare from the crude and common elements which surround them' (Haldane Lectures, I). Also in the first Haldane Lecture, Thomson made clear his differences with John Ruskin over the lesson of nature to artists. Thomson graphically argued how a direct, unfiltered copying of nature would be fruitless in the development of the æsthetic faculty.

From Hay's writing it is clear that he was as much a 'Grecian' in opinion as Thomson. Hay stated in the introduction to *The Science of Beauty*, that 'the science of the ancient Greek artists enabled them to excel the highest individual productions of nature in the perfection of symmetrical beauty', and with the same view later shared by Thomson in the first Haldane Lecture, Hay continued:

Consequently, all objects in nature are not equally well adapted for artistic study, and it therefore requires, on the part of the artist, beside true genius, much experience and care to enable him to choose proper subjects from nature; and it is in the choice of such subjects, and not in plagiarism from the ancients, that he should select with knowledge and adapt with wisdom.

The attempts by Hay and Thomson to perceive the same harmonic laws running through all of nature show an awareness of Burke's contrary views. In a section of Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, entitled, 'Proportion not the cause of BEAUTY in the human species', he stated that,

The patrons of proportion have transferred their artificial ideas to nature, and not borrowed from thence the proportions they use in works of art; because in any discussion of this subject, they always quit as soon as possible the open field of natural beauties, the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and fortify themselves within the artificial lines and angles of architecture.

Poetically Hay described how as a symmetrically beautiful building falls into ruin, its beauty would still depend on its original type of symmetrical beauty, only increasingly blended with the picturesque, and how the same is true of the human countenance with age. For both Hay and Thomson, unlike Burke, the supreme example of the highest principles of beauty in all of nature is that of *the human figure*. This is an ancient belief, and one which enjoyed a resurgence in the Renaissance; it is also a Judæo-Christian belief: of man being made in the likeness of God (Genesis 1).

Hay devoted a large amount of energy to the study of proportion in both male and female figures. And in addition to chapters on such study contained within general works on the principles of beauty by Hay, he dedicated a number of volumes to the study of the human form alone. For example, *The Geometric Beauty of the Human Figure Defined* of 1851, and

*The Natural Principles of Beauty as Developed in the Human Figure* of 1852. In the opening of this latter work, Hay perceived in the human form the familiar triad – fitness, strength and beauty; and noted the associated aspects of inquiry – the anatomical, the physiological and the æsthetical. He went on to state that,

Although the principles which govern beauty – like those which govern fitness and strength – are in themselves perfect, they operate throughout nature in the production of an infinite variety, each individual involving always some deviation from a perfect development. It is in this variety which has led some writers to doubt the existence of a definite law of beauty, and to advance the doctrine that beauty is not a quality in the object itself, but a feeling of admiration originating in the mind of the observer through associations of ideas, habit, natural affection, or some other similar cause. But the universal acknowledgement of all civilised nations that the remains of ancient Greek art exhibit in their proportions a degree of beauty to which ordinary nature only approximates, is alone quite sufficient to convince us that the beauty of proportion, at least is an inherent quality in the object, which, agreeably to a law of nature, is responded to by an equally inherent principle of appreciation in the human mind...

In the third Haldane Lecture, Thomson stated his views on the lesson of the human form with great eloquence. Thomson hypothesised that if it were possible to fly far enough out into space, we might be able to view the

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earth at the dawn of creation (an extraordinary speculation for the time). Following a perception of the luxuriant scene imagined in the Garden of Eden, Thomson poetically described the arrival of another, yet more beautiful creation – that of mankind:

There is a lustrous radiance of colour, a delicacy of light and shade, a symmetry of form, a harmony of proportion, a freedom of action and attitude, a variety in the disposition of its limbs, and a general flexibility of the whole frame, which excites our utmost surprise and delight, and makes us feel that of all the wonderful and beautiful objects which God has made in this world, the human frame is the most wonderful and the most beautiful. And herein we see the true proto-Doric, a many-sided figure of infinitely greater complexity than the polygonal piers of Egyptian tombs, the type of that ideal perfection which in a variety of phases, was the great end of Greek effort, the guiding-star of Greek genius.

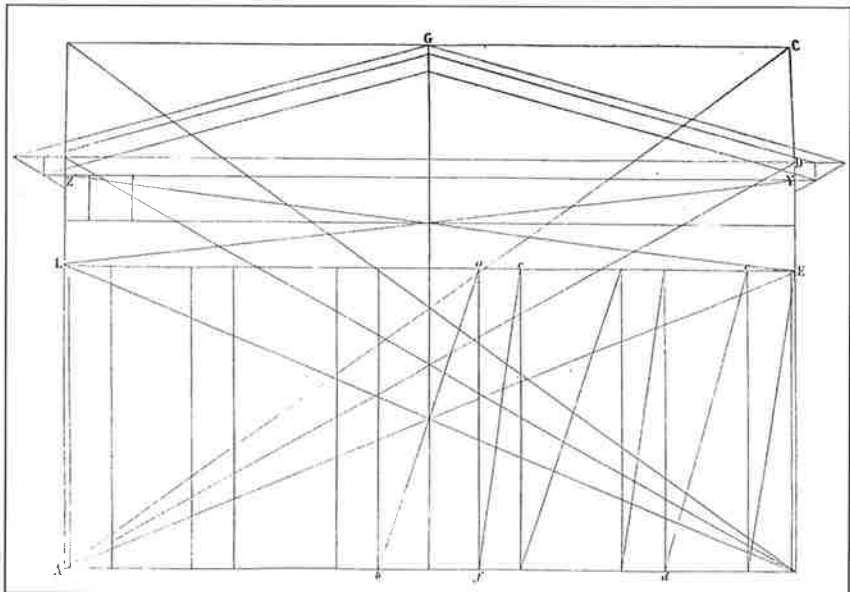
In *The Orthographic Beauty of the Parthenon* of 1853, Hay noted a short-coming in the work of F.C. Penrose in his apparent failure to detect the Greeks' conscious use of ellipses. Penrose had developed the work of Sir James Pennethorne – published in 1837- on the discovery of 'optical corrections' in Greek architecture, such as the subtle curvature of horizontal lines, and in 1851 Penrose published *An Investigation into the Principles of Athenian Architecture*.

Thomson referred to these discoveries in the third Haldane Lecture, and it is widely accepted that Thomson incorporated these refinements into his own work, although a thorough, illustrated

survey of these aspects has yet to be attempted. (Such an undertaking has been omitted here, as the techniques of optical correction are not taken to have integral value to the generation of designs and have had no symbolic or imaginative properties ascribed to them other than to express an even greater degree of devotion and care in the works, this is not to undervalue their subtle importance.)

Hay noted that, 'Mr Penrose, like all who have studied the subject with care, seems firmly to believe that a law of harmonic proportion governed the orthography of this structure' (the Parthenon), and sought not to 'lower the estimation in which that gentleman's very laborious and highly valuable *Investigation of the Principles of Athenian Architecture* must be held

dimensional comparisons of various lengths, vertical and horizontal. In this analysis, Hay felt Penrose was not doing justice to the aesthetic achievements of that structure, arising from his 'attempt to find linear instead of angular harmony.' Hay traced Penrose's method only back as far as Vitruvius. As with Thomson, Hay saw a degeneration of Greek principles under the Romans. In *Proportion or the Geometric Principle of Beauty Analysed*, Hay stated that, 'This knowledge of the principles of geometric beauty which the ancient Grecians possessed, and applied systematically to the arts of design, seems...to have been lost before the time of Vitruvius.' The following illustration shows Hay's analysis of 'angular harmony' underlying the Parthenon.



by all who take an interest in the subject.'

However, another fundamental criticism of Penrose's approach was made by Hay. In seeking the governing principles underlying the Parthenon, Penrose made

Penrose, through the pages of the *Builder*, seems to have been receptive to Hay's criticisms, and suggested that his own measurements actually provided corroboration for Hay's analysis. Another, under the name of

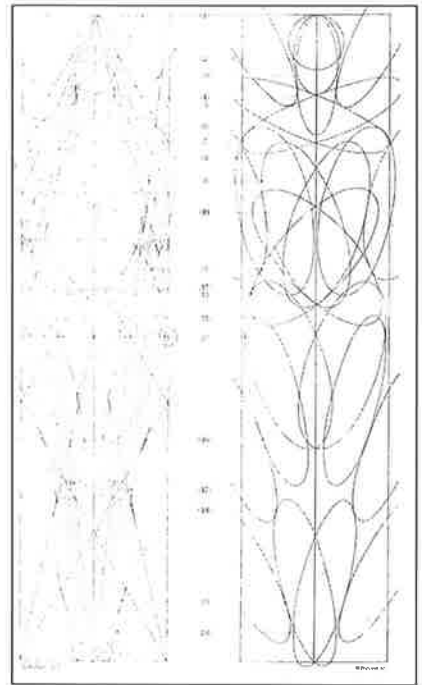
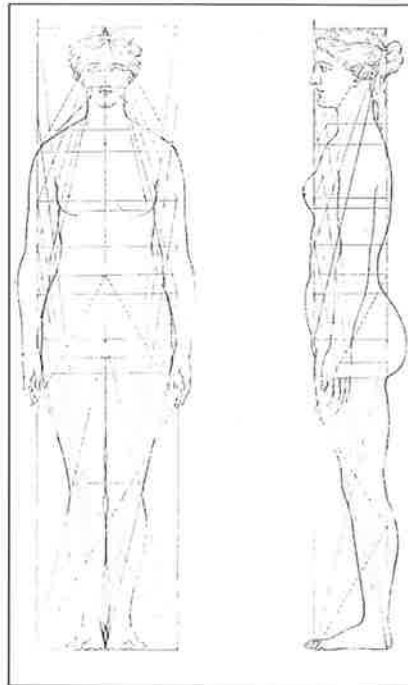


'Autocthon', in a letter addressed to the *Builder* in 1853, wrote, 'Will you allow me, through the medium of your columns to thank Mr. Penrose for his testimony to the truth of Mr. Hay's revival of Pythagoras? The dimensions which he gives are to me the surest verification of the theory that I could have desired.'

Thomson was obviously influenced by Hay's discovery of the use of the ellipse by the Greeks, and aware of its value in the design of detail and ornament. With regard to the harmony between the architecture and sculpture of the Parthenon, in the fourth Haldane Lecture, Thomson stated that, 'while it is greatly owing to the fact that the same law of proportion governs both, there is also the fact that all the mouldings of the Doric style are of a fineness corresponding to the gentle swellings and depressions of the muscles of the human frame.'

In the following lecture Thomson described how, 'The delicate curves of the mouldings, which a perfect familiarity with the lines of the human frame enabled the Greeks to draw, gave place to a coarse, bold style of moulding more in accordance with the rough-and-ready habits of the Romans.' Further on, after discussing the beauty of form inherent in the shape of an egg, Thomson stated that,

The Greeks recognised the beauty of the line [inherent in an egg], and adapted its finest qualities in their mouldings, which are nearly all composed sections of this form; the Romans on the other hand, adopted it for the ground plan of their amphi theatres, whilst the curves of their mouldings generally are composed of sections of the circle.



Above: Illustrations by Hay

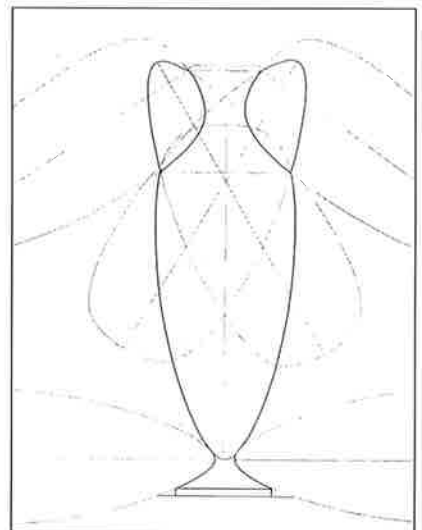
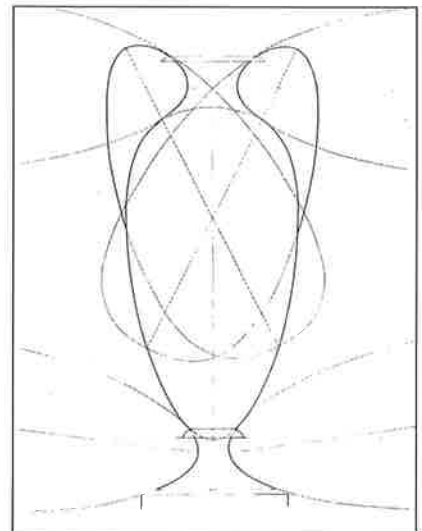
In *The Orthographic Beauty of the Parthenon*, twenty years earlier, in the dawning of Thomson's maturity as an architect, Hay had stated with regard to the elliptic curve,

It would appear that a knowledge of this simple and beautiful figure, and of its value in architectural orthography, formed no element either in the education of the Roman architects, or in that of those of the middle ages, for the curve of the ellipse is equally ignored in the comparatively crude works of the former, and in the semi- barbarous productions of the latter.

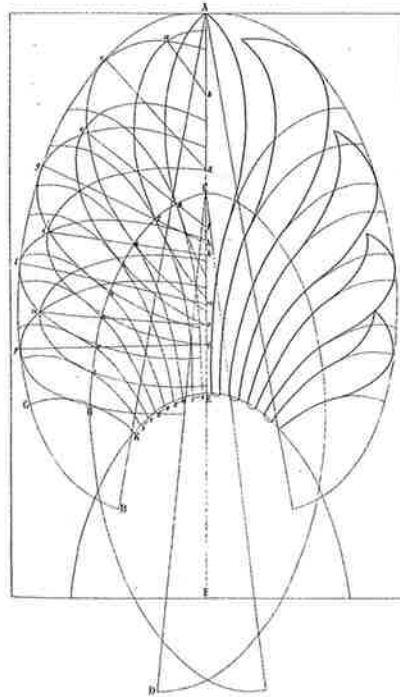
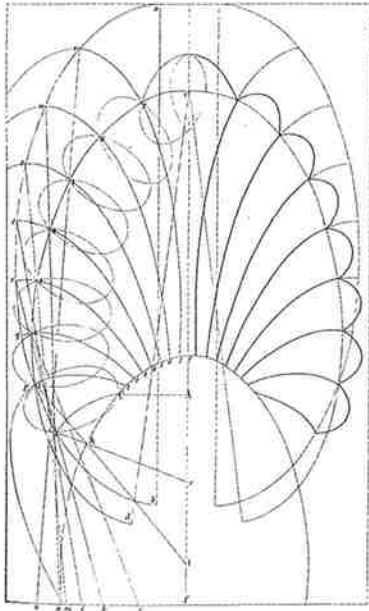
Similarly, in *The Harmonic Law of Nature Applied to Architectural Design* of 1855, Hay wrote that,

The composite ellipse appears to be fitted for almost universal application in the arts of ornamental design. It seems to supply a method of producing correctly every curve in the outline of the best examples of Grecian architecture from the entases of the columns to the smallest moulding, as also the outlines of the most beautiful of the Grecian and Etruscan vases.

The following illustrations show some of the practical applications of the ellipse in the design of ornament as put forward by Hay:



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## The Rise and Fall of the Æsthetic Faculty as illustrated by the Haldane Lectures

In the first Haldane Lecture Thomson set out his intention to trace the creative use of man's æsthetic faculty. In the second lecture, he explained the development of man's understanding of natural principles as applied to art and architecture from the earliest times through to the achievements of the Egyptians.

Thomson began with a description of man's first instinctive efforts in the erection of a circular hut and then described the setting out of a rectangular dwelling as a step forwards in the exercise of man's 'reasoning faculty'. In this progression, Thomson noted that, 'Some degree of mathematical skill is required in setting out the plan.' The significant geometrical discovery that Thomson implicitly referred to can easily be illustrated (below):

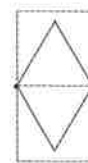
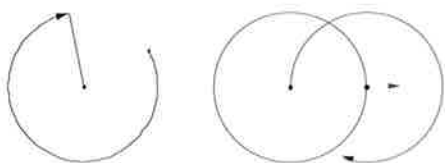
By using a stake driven into the ground and a rope or vine, early man could easily construct a circle. However, the construction of a rectangle in a natural landscape with no obvious right-angles, is not as simple as it may seem. It is the first significant step in an understanding of 'geometry' (literally 'earth-measure'). The construction of perpendicular lines from first principles requires the construction of a *Vesica Pisces*. This is established by constructing another circle of the same diameter (i.e. with the same length of rope), with its centre at a point on the circumference of the original circle. The 'eye' shape formed between the intersection of the two circles is the *Vesica Pisces*. By connecting the centre points of the two circles with a straight line, as well as the two intersection points at either end of the *Vesica*, perpendicular lines can be generated. (If the centre point on the second circle had been chosen by finding where the shadow of the stake crossed it at dawn, the alignment of the figure would show the

directions of north, south, east and west. In this process originates the meaning of the word 'orientate' - 'align to the east'.)

As well as enabling the construction of perpendicular lines, the *Vesica Pisces* also directly facilitates the creation of two equilateral triangles (the prime polygon) and two squares. From these principles, more intersecting circles can be drawn and all the basic polygons begin to unfold, giving order where before all was chaos. It is because of the universal significance of this principle that the *Vesica Pisces* can be found revered in most civilisations at an early stage, attributed with both practical and sacred properties.

The infant Jesus was often depicted within a *Vesica Pisces* by the medieval masons as the birth of truth principles. The *Vesica* is referred to in classical Hindu literature as the *yonis*, the same name given to the female reproductive organs. In Hay's analysis of the female figure (as illustrated earlier), he showed the *Vesica* implied by two equilateral triangles about her centre.

The idea of the *Vesica Pisces* appears to have been appreciated by both mediaevalists and classicists in the middle of the nineteenth century. In a number of books and in the pages of the *Builder*, there appeared discussion of the *Vesica*'s practical use as well as its powerful and complex symbolism. Hay, in *The Science of Beauty*, noted its discovery in the plan of the Parthenon, but bemoaned its being described as 'mythic' or



'mysterious' as obscuring its 'scientific truth.'

Having described the earliest developments of secular architecture and the satisfaction of the need for shelter, Thomson went on to explain how man begins to exercise the aesthetic faculty in the creation of objects which go beyond mere facility. The indebtedness to Hay in the following passage by Thomson is very apparent:

Instead of copying nature for his decorative forms, he draws directly upon the aesthetic faculty. He begins with lines and spots, simple circles, intersected circles, stars, either single or in rows, straight lines, zigzag lines, wave lines and spiral lines, in every conceivable combination. He shows his sense of proportion in dividing spaces with noticeable degrees of relationship to each other and probably colours the whole in harmonious contrasts.

In the next major advance of man's aesthetic faculty, Thomson saw the direct assistance of the Divine. He repeated the passage in the Bible (Exodus Ch.31) where Moses is told by God that Bezaleel had been chosen to construct the Ark and that Bezaleel would teach (italicised in the original lecture text) other skilled craftsmen. In describing this significant event, Thomson revealed his belief in the fundamental role of biblical architecture and divine revelation in the development of sacred architecture.

The work of Philo (c.20 BC-c.AD 40), an Alexandrian Jew, may assist in interpreting the significance of this passage. Philo is often viewed as providing a link between Jewish and Hellenistic culture, and his works, although having strong

Stoic influences attributed to them, are primarily seen as Platonic and Pythagorean interpretations of texts from the Old Testament; he was apparently unaware of the life of Christ. Interestingly in the third Haldane Lecture Thomson said of his revered Greeks that, 'The people most nearly resembling them were the Jews.'

Readings of Philo's works led a twentieth century author to proclaim, 'who was Plato but Moses Atticus?' Striking aspects of Philo are his Pythagorean explanations of the universal and harmonic significance of certain numbers occurring in the Bible, as well as the perfect laws underlying nature. Pythagorean readings of the significant numbers mentioned in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, have always been an area for speculation. (One of the most recent theories has been expounded by Gordon Strachan – a Scottish Presbyterian – in his book, *Jesus the Master Builder: Druid Mysteries and the Dawn of Christianity* of 1998).

Resonances between Thomson's words and works by Philo are not hard to find; for example from *On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses* Ch.19, Philo wrote,

So many and so essential are the benefits within the scope of the constitutions and movements of the heavenly bodies. To how vast a number of other operations of nature, methinks, do they extend! Operations obscure to us- for all things are not within the ken of mortals- yet working together for the permanence of the whole; operations which are invariably carried out under ordinances and laws which God laid down in His universe as unalterable.

On the significance of Bezaleel, Philo explained:

Bezaleel means, then, "in the shadow of God"; but God's shadow is His Word, which he made use of like an instrument, and so made the world. But this shadow and what we may describe as the representation, is the archetype for further creation.

In the paragraph following his reading from *Exodus*, Thomson jumped forward in time to mention the temples of the Greeks in parallel with the temple built to house the Ark and their common sacred purpose. Thomson was of the view that, 'Religion has been the soul of art from the beginning.' On the archetype of this temple, as was to be shared by different races, Thomson stated that, 'The form of the temple was not controlled by any utilitarian consideration.' He went on to assert that,

The temple was meant as far as possible to represent the nature and attributes of the Divinity; and so the highest powers of the greatest minds were taxed to express in symbols and in abstract forms and in combinations of lines those ideas of beauty and grandeur which resulted in the sacred architecture of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks.

After paralleling aspects of the Greeks and Jews, Thomson returned to the continuing development of the aesthetic faculty and glowingly described the stirrings of the Egyptians. 'It is with a feeling of the profoundest awe that we approach the valley of the Nile', he began. Thomson then poetically described in some detail the yearly

*Continued on next page*

flooding of the Nile. Despite the powerful romantic imagery, akin to the paintings of David Roberts, it seems likely that there were other allusions within this passage. Thomson stated, on the subject of the Nile,

Moved by a God-like intelligence and love towards the people under its care, it spreads its refreshing and fattening floods over the whole land at the proper time of the year, and after saturating the ground and tempering the air for a season, it retires into the sea, leaving the sun to pour his quickening beams upon the germinating seed, which soon springs up, and yields a bountiful harvest to those who in faith sowed upon the waters. Such a state of things was well calculated to cause reflection in the minds of the early inhabitants of this singular land... Egypt is regarded by all as the cradle of the arts.

It would seem that there is another strong explanation for Thomson's description in addition to the pictorial. Drawing on Plato as well as other sources, the words of a living author, Robert Lawlor, very adequately reveal this deeper implication. He states, in the opening lines of his 1982 book, *Sacred Geometry*, that:

'Geometry' means 'measure of the earth'. In ancient Egypt, from which Greece inherited this study, the Nile would flood its banks each year, covering the land and obliterating the orderly marking of plot and farm areas. This yearly flood symbolised to the Egyptians the cyclical return of the primal watery chaos, and when the waters receded the work began of redefining and re-establishing the boundaries. This work was called geometry and was seen as

a re-establishment of the principle of law and order on earth. Each year the areas measured out would be somewhat different. The human order would shift and this was reflected in the ordering of the earth. The Temple astronomer might say that certain celestial configurations had changed so that the orientation or location of a temple had to be adjusted accordingly. So the laying out of squares upon the earth had, for the Egyptian, a metaphysical as well as a physical and social dimension. This activity of 'measuring the earth' became the basis for a science of natural law as it is embodied in the archetypal forms of circle, square and triangle.

Following on from his remarkable introduction to the arts of Egypt, Thomson began to describe its principle monuments. The evocative terms that Thomson used in praise of the tombs and temples were words such as 'the permanent', 'the idea of eternity', 'the principle of repetition', a 'love of immensity', 'infinite space' and 'perpetual rest'. The general qualities of these words may be seen to concur strongly with Burke's definitions of the sublime and the imagery of artists such as John Martin (1789-1854) and David Roberts, both of whom Thomson admired. In addition, however, Thomson saw in the Great Pyramid 'a very high degree of mathematical, mechanical, and constructive skill' and that, 'No form could be conceived better calculated for endurance', and in Egypt's obelisks Thomson discerns the added element of 'proportion, expressing the idea of justice or truth.'

By the third Haldane Lecture, Thomson had prepared the way for an appraisal of Greek art and architecture, the culmination of the previous two lectures. The Greeks in Thomson's opinion came closest to perfection in their artistic achievements. Interestingly he stated that, 'The people most nearly resembling them were the Jews.'

In the Greeks, Thomson detected principles that could enable an infinite production of new works equal to the power of the originals despite the relative scarcity of original Grecian remains. Thomson saw that it was in over-looking the operation of these underlying laws that the earlier Greek Revivalists had generally fallen short of the originals: 'they failed; not because of the scantiness of the material, but because they could not see through the material into the laws upon which that architecture rested. They failed to master their style, and so became its slaves.'

In the *Builder* of 1851 (p385), a review of a lecture delivered at the Government School of Design in Somerset House by a Mr Wyndham Harding in praise of Hay's theories was published. After acknowledging the forms of Greek art and architecture to be fairly regarded as beautiful, Harding continued:

In what, then, does the secret of their beauty consist, and how may they, or forms with similar excellent qualities, be reproduced at will? This is the problem the designer has to solve, and which Mr. Hay thinks he can assist him to do on principles so broad and comprehensive as will enable the designer himself in turn to become the creator of forms as

beautiful, although original, as those which he is now in despair to copy.

Thomson described how the attributes of 'variety' and 'flexibility' were held by many of his contemporaries as advantages inherent in the abundant examples of original Gothic architecture over the relative scarcity of ancient Greek remains, Thomson continued:

But I come now to speak of two elements which we find carried to a very high degree of excellence in Greek architecture, and which have never been overdone, and never can be overdone. These are beauty or symmetry of form, and harmony of relative proportion; and these are the essential elements of Greek architecture, distinguishing it from all other styles. And these also are the essential elements of the beauty of the higher animal forms which distinguish them from all the other forms of nature...

Amongst the lecture reviews, theoretical discussions and letters within the architectural press of the late 1840's and early 50's there were a number of pleas and arguments for the continuing value and excellence of Classical and Greek precedent in architecture, but rarely did these propose anything convincing enough to stem the rising appeal of the Gothic Revival. In addition to the writings of Hay there is one who appears to have stood out at the tail end of the Classical resistance, heralding and calling for a new spirit through his prose, seeming to anticipate many of the opinions later expressed by Thomson in his lectures. This was the mysterious Samuel Huggins of Liverpool, (1811-1885) (*see P.17*)

Huggins's writing firmly concurs with Thomson regarding the essential principles of Greek architecture; as well as with the broad theories of Hay, by whom he was perhaps also influenced. In an article in the *Builder* (July 10, 1852) entitled 'Greek Peripteral Architecture and Ecclesiastical Design', with regard to the appropriateness of Greek architecture for Christian worship, Huggins stated that:

A chaste beauty, a noble simplicity, unaffected purity, and truth, are proper art – qualities to associate with Christian worship; and in no style can these excellencies reign in such perfection as in the architecture of the Greeks;— I say in the architecture of the Greeks, for it is emphatically the architecture of proportion, which is its distinguishing principle, "the stamen which they drew out into one immense connected web;"

Thomson saw the display of perfect principles in Greek architecture as the essential distinguishing feature from other architectures; 'All other styles are ruder or stronger in their parts', he stated. In noting this distinction, Thomson criticised the eminent architectural historian, James Fergusson, for 'his very small way of accounting for very great things', in the latter's theory that the Greek Corinthian Order was 'made up of the bell-shaped capital of the Egyptians and the spiral of the Assyrians.' Thomson then contrasted the 'rude nondescript scrolls of the Assyrians' with the elegance of the Greek capital.

Thomson read as implicit in Fergusson's writing that whatever the Greeks could do, 'they were not equal to the invention of the rude original' and had earlier dis-

agreed with Fergusson's belittling interpretations of the Greek Doric and Ionic columns. Thomson felt it necessary to repeat his point again:

Were it not for those persistent attempts, not merely to diminish the distance that lies between rudeness and excellence, I should not have thought it necessary to remind you that architectural design consists in moulding and adapting forms and lines into harmonious proportions and combinations, by the exercise of the æsthetic faculty. Forms which do not possess these qualities cannot be regarded as in any wise connected with art; for it is the spirit and not the body, that we look to as a means of enlightenment and as a source of enjoyment.

As proof of their lack of refinement, Thomson even went as far as ascribing the maligned 'arch' to the Egyptians and Assyrians. 'The Greeks rejected it simply because it did not suit their purpose, or, to speak more strongly, because it was diametrically opposed to their purposes', he followed.

In the fourth Haldane Lecture, Thomson described the loss of the principles that the Greeks had distilled, as the influence of the Romans became dominant. He stated that,

A radical change was taking place; the architecture of the ancient world, which through long ages had been little by little ridding itself of everything of a merely accidental or meretricious character, and by a process of centripetal consolidation had approached that state of settled tranquillity which rests upon the perfect law of God, was now to

*Continued on next page*

by DOMINIC D'ANGELO

# The first John Baird: architect and mentor, Part II

ALEXANDER Thomson's departure from the architectural firm of John Baird I does not seem to have affected the latter's workload. In 1851 he constructed a set of West Nile Street premises for Messrs Wilson, Kay & Co. (now demolished) which, in one way, continued the Thomson connection: Alexander's elder brother Ebenezer had become a partner in Wilson, Kay & Co before his early death some years before.

## Sacred and Aesthetic Principles

be broken up from that sure foundation.

Whilst noting some reflections of the Greek spirit of true invention, such as in the capitals of the Temple of Vesta in Tivoli, or in the Pantheon in Rome, Thomson was generally disparaging of the Roman efforts. In perceiving a decline following the achievements of the Greeks, Thomson clearly did not subscribe to contemporary theories of constant linear advance in architecture or of a necessarily progressive process of evolution, rather he alluded to ever-present timeless qualities.

In the light of other authors such as Hay, the above interpretation of the four Haldane Lectures, the most complete account of Thomson's theories, has been necessary to illustrate an important thread running through them. This appraisal opens the way for an investigation of implicit harmonic proportions in Thomson's architecture, as alluded to in the lectures, not as a whimsical exercise, but potentially integral to his whole approach and religious faith.

*Continued in next issue*

Like Thomson's, Baird workload was a varied one: a monument to James Ewing (d. 1853) in the Glasgow Necropolis, followed by the extensive Prince of Wales Buildings 34-8 Buchanan Street (remodelled as Princes Square 1985-7). An 'extremely long (twenty bays), plainly classical... front range of a slightly earlier development of chambers' as *Buildings of Scotland: Glasgow* describes it. At the time of its completion it would have been even more impressive, with probably the longest frontage of any building on Buchanan Street to that date.

Less ostentatious was his 1854 on a tobacco warehouse a few blocks away in James Watt Street (the building was enlarged in 1911, according to Gomme & Walker), while another warehouse raised other problems.

Macdonald's Sewed Muslin Warehouse, at the junction of Ingram, Hanover and Queen Streets, for for Messrs J & D MacDonald (now demolished) had to fit into Glasgow's carefully ordered street plan. However, the *Glasgow Herald* of 6th March that year reports a Dean of Guild ruling to take down a newly-built wall "for encroaching beyond the street-line". At least it was the constructors, rather than the architect, who was deemed to be at fault.

Another warehouse planned that year was Sir James Campbell's Warehouse at the corner of 115-37 Ingram Street and 111-28 Brunswick Street. Baird's design is not known, but Sir James Campbell had loftier aspirations, something altogether more baronial. At Baird's suggestion, the design work was handed over to R.W. Billings, whose complex (now converted into apartments) still stands.

But it was another building, Gardner's Warehouse, at 36 Jamaica Street which is perhaps John Baird I's principal claim to fame in Glasgow: "One of the outstanding iron warehouses of the nineteenth century", and built in conjunction

with the ironfounder McConnel, it survived relatively unscathed until last year, when, with furnishers Martin & Frost's decision to quit the site, it is now in the process of conversion into licensed premises.

Outside the city, Urie House at Fetteresso, Kincardineshire, was rebuilt for Alexander Baird in a late Tudor style (the building was enlarged in 1883-4 and later gutted). Back in Glasgow, a warehouse followed for Smith & Sons' at 208-16 Argyle Street (now demolished). It was to be among his last work.

Gildard described John Baird I as 'a large and well-built man' who 'had a presence as of one that ought to be in authority', but by 1857, almost sixty years old, he was feeling his age. In recognition of his work, and perhaps also in recognition of the loss of what might have been his crowning achievement – the rebuilding of Glasgow University – in 1857 his friends commissioned a portrait from Sir Daniel Macnee, RSA.

The following year Baird took on James Thomson, with whom he has worked for some time, as a full partner, but even this relief of work was to no avail: on 18th December 1859, John Baird I died from heart failure at Westfield, Partickhill, Glasgow.

Nine years after his death, Macnee's portrait of John Baird was one of the pictures on show in the new New Galleries of Art at the Corporation Buildings in Sauchiehall Street (now the MacLellan Galleries), lent by his widow. He may have been denied the final prize, but a decade after his death, John Baird's reputation remained high in the city in which he had begun work as a teenager.

One query: Where is Macnee's portrait of John Baird now? Not in Kelvingrove, according to their records. Does it remain in private hands, or in some professional collection?

# Samuel Huggins (1811-1885): architectural visionary

SAMUEL HUGGINS's better known younger brother was the animal-painter, William Huggins. Despite being president of the Liverpool Architectural Society from 1856 to 1858, Samuel does not appear to have had any work realised. In 1861 he and his brother moved to Chester where Samuel took up the cause of the city's ancient buildings. His stance on the proposed restoration of Chester Cathedral led to the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.

In his obituary in the *Builder* of 1885 (p.129), he was described as having 'a very clear-seeing critical intellect.' The writer continued,

He was, however, a sensitive and retiring man, and never seemed able, or even inclined, to try for success in the field of active professional work... Mr Huggins was a devoted Classicist, but he did not consider that Classical architecture in the present day consisted in copying orders or Italian details; on the contrary, he was always urging the study of new combinations, and had portfolios full of small studies of his own, mostly studied in Indian ink, of numerous "variations" on columnar architecture, in the form of designs for imaginary buildings and monuments.

It was Huggins who wrote a two-part essay in the *Builder* (6 & 20 Jan 1855), regarding the newly opened St. George's Hall, which, together with Thomas Hamilton's Royal High School in Edinburgh, Thomson later declared to be 'unquestionably the two finest buildings in the kingdom'. Huggins also has high praise for St George's Hall – 'I deem it to be one of the finest pieces of exterior architecture in the world' – and of the character which Elmes had aspired to give it. Huggins does, however, make some interesting criticisms of the Hall with which Thomson would probably have sympathised:

Windows may be so treated as to be innocent of any injury to the façade they pierce, however fully architecturally or classically pure it may be, as a door or niche; and our noble sheets of polished plate glass render the task less difficult than formerly; but at the back of St. Georges Hall no attempt of the kind is made, the window openings being filled in with vertically sliding sashes, the upper ones over-hanging the lower, as usual in dwelling house windows, and divided in the ordinary manner. Such features in an edifice whose purpose is so far removed from above the ordinary utilities of life, association alone would go far to render disagreeable, much as it would the occurrence of so many low metaphors in an epic poem,

Elsewhere Huggins reiterated the same view on windows. In an article entitled 'Expression in Architecture' (*Builder* 12 July, 1851) he stated with regard to religious buildings that,

...windows should be introduced cautiously behind a colonnade... common sliding sashes are wholly inadmissible: the filling up must be made architectural as well as the dressings, if it is to unite with them in the production of a whole.

Such words remind us of Thomson's elemental use of plate glass in windows. There are many other instances in Huggins' essays which are illustrated by aspects of Thomson's architecture and parallel many of Thomson's opinions in the lectures of the 1860's and 70's. For instance, whilst Huggins never appears to have advocated a complete omission of the arch from modern architecture, he wrote of the trabeated style that,

Though the Athenian temple was the only pure and perfect expression of the epistylar spirit, and in that form alone has the Greek architecture been given to the world in its simple integrity, yet its component features and elements are objects of are objects of genuine beauty... and as the laws of their combination those of gravitation and support – are immutable laws of the universe... (*Builder* May 20, 1854)

In another article he wrote,

As to the horizontal spirit of Greek architecture, why should that be excluded from design? Why should all point upwards, as if earth were not? The symbolism of horizontality has been overrated or too exclusively aimed at. Religion has reference to earth as well as heaven, and there is that in it which may well be aptly symbolised by the sublime repose of the Greek architecture, which is as applicable as the aspiration of the Gothic. If the one directs to heaven, the other says, "Peace on earth;" and the Christian temple transfused with the horizontal spirit, would very fitly be an object of peaceful repose and relief to the eye.... I cannot consider the discarding of the entablature as a necessary and inevitable consequence of the new spirit of Christianity, but as being the fruit of the accidental meeting of that spirit with a depraved taste in art among the Romans.... Is there anything, it might be asked, in the Christian code that commanded arches to usurp the entablature? Is theological truth opposed to architectural truth? The beauty of holiness to the beauty of art? Is the destruction of the poetic a mission of the Gospel? (*Builder* July 10 1852)

There was a strong prophetic, forward looking energy in Huggins' words. For example in this plea for the future there are resonances with both Thomson and Hay:

For with the vast treasures of the past at our command – with the new materials and methods of bestowed by science – with our increased insight into the geometry and æsthetics of ancient art, and above all, our successful researches into the principles of the

Supreme Architect, we should be able to strike out new forms and effects of beauty undreamt of in the architecture of the old time...Pure, and truthful, and noble architecture must come, not from Athens or Venice, but from the earnest soul, the large heart and penetrative mind of the artist. (*Builder* June 10, 1854)

In an earlier article Huggin wrote that,

The temple ordonnance, in short is the simplest arrangement that ever spoke so forcibly to the mind and imagination, or awoke emotions so unutterable. The few attempts hitherto made to render it available for ecclesiastical edifices have, for the most part, been made in a spirit of servile imitation, and have therefore failed to give satisfaction. (*Builder* July 12, 1851)

These scattered quotes cannot fully do justice to Huggins views, but are hoped to be representative of his noteworthy stance. Whilst the general tenor of his writing is apparently very similar to Thomson's views expressed later, there may be some direct parallels in actual wording to be made. For example Huggins wrote that, 'St. Pancras Church, whatever purity of taste it evinces, was designed in too timid and narrow a spirit', (*Builder* 10 July, 1852). In a lecture of 1869 ('Obstacles and Aids to Architectural Progress'), Thomson said that, "St. Pancras Church is the purest, and shows some good points, yet its general treatment is timorous in the extreme."

Until now there has been little mention of Huggins; his views were anomalous to the general trend of Victorian architecture and he did not appear to have built anything. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, in his *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain*, described Huggins as 'tedious' for having detected a crisis in British architecture. In *The Life and Works of Alexander Thomson*, McFadzean also refers to Huggins, passingly noting him as reviewing 'the familiar reasons for, and against, Greek architecture' in modern churches (*Builder* 10 July 1852); before going on to quote an appraisal of Huggins in the following issue (*Builder* 17 July 1852). The reviewer is described as having 'very perceptively summed up those architects who had practiced the recent 'Greco-mania' as it was called.'

In focusing on the words of the reviewer, which were more or less, a reiteration of Huggins' and entirely deferential to him (something McFadzean does not appear to have appreciated); McFadzean seems to have missed Huggins's potentially greater significance. McFadzean quotes the reviewer in the chapter dealing with influences on Thomson 1856-71, when in fact the article appeared in 1852. Huggins' distinctive views regularly appeared, at length, in the *Builder* from about 1851. This was the period when Thomson must have been formulating how and when he should really assert himself architecturally.



# Queen's Park Church: after the bombs



Church burned out by incendiaries during the air raid in Central Scotland.

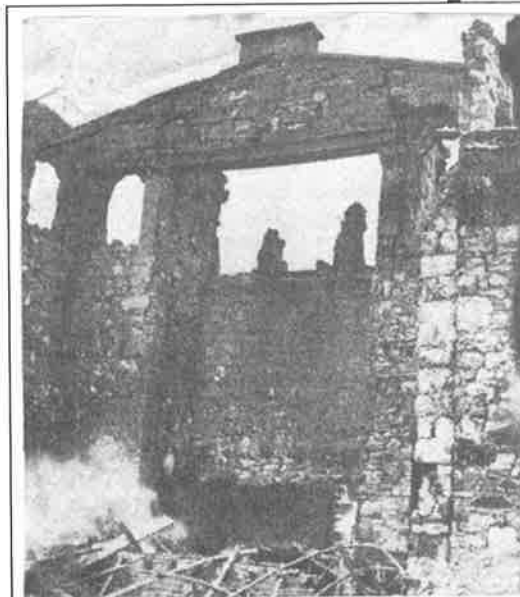
By courtesy of Mr Edward Fraser of Giffnock, we reproduce here some contemporary press cuttings illustrating the destruction of Thomson's Queen's Park Church by fire on 20 March 1943. This was Scotland's worst architectural loss of the Second World War. A fine water-colour by James Miller depicting the ruined entrance of the gutted building is on display in the Thomson Exhibition.



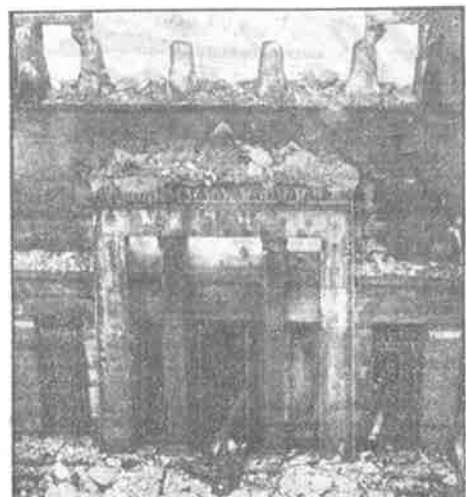
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## Raid Ruins

Only the shell remains of this church gutted by incendiaries during Wednesday night's raid over Central Scotland.



Interior of the church gutted by fire from incendiaries in Central Scotland last night. Right—N.F.S. men fight the blaze.



FINE CHURCH DESTROYED.—Fallen masonry litters the steps of this church completely destroyed by incendiaries in Wednesday night's raid on a Central Scotland town. The church was one of the finest examples of church architecture in the town.



*Above: The interior before the war.*



### **The Newsletter**

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### **Back Issues**

of the *Newsletter* are available, price 50p each plus 2 second class stamps, from the Hon. Secretary at the Society's address.

# A Missing Vase

THE LANSDOWN Tower outside Bath (*below, right*) was built in about 1827 for that somewhat sinister and yet ridiculous plutocrat, the aesthete, author and collector, William Beckford. It was designed by H.E. Goodridge and its tall tower is topped by a sort of Grecian lantern. It was Nikolaus Pevsner who, in the *Buildings of England* volume for *North Somerset and Bristol* (1958) wrote of the Lansdown Tower "the style is more similar to Greek Thomson's than to anyone else's in Britain. Did he know Bath? Or was the tower illustrated in a place accessible to him?" Possibly – as a volume of *Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath* was published in 1844, after Beckford's death.

We mention this, as our readers might possibly be able to help the Beckford Tower Trust, which is now restoring this remarkable building and is faced with the problem of recreating Beckford's interiors. Our illustration (*right*) was made by Willes Maddox in 1844 and shows 'The Staircase and Granite Vase.'

Unfortunately, while the spiral staircase in the tower is still extant, the vase, which also served as a heating apparatus, has gone missing. It was sold, along with much else, at an auction in 1845 when it was described as a "magnificent colossal vase of Peterhead granite, highly polished, 7 feet high, 3 feet diameter. This

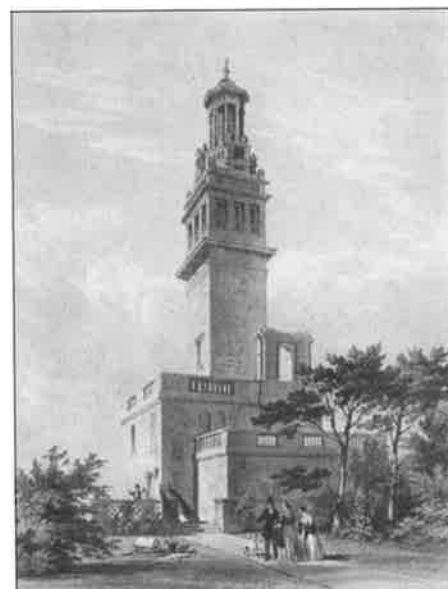
vase is of pure classical design, tazza-shaped, on a pillar and pedestal of the same material.

On the pedestal are three finely



executed demilions, in bronze. It is enriched with bold mouldings." The thing had cost Beckford £300; it was sold for 90 guineas. And then the trail goes cold.

It seems extraordinary that so big and heavy a thing should have disappeared without trace. There is a suspicion, however, that it might have gone to Scotland. One of Beckford's daughters married the Duke of Hamilton and, in consequence, there is Beckfordiana at Brodick Castle. But no granite vase. Has anyone seen it?



**Glasgow 1999 Book Offer**  
This voucher entitles the bearer, when purchasing 'Alexander Thomson: The Unknown Genius' at The Lighthouse, to purchase one of a selection of Glasgow 1999 catalogues at half price.